

HEAD LICE

Where do head lice come from?

Head lice have been around for thousands of years. As with any insect, they learn to adapt to their environment in order to survive. We are never going to be completely rid of them, but we can make managing them easier.

Do head lice fly or jump?

Head lice do not have wings so they cannot fly. They can't jump because they do not have 'knees'.

So how do head lice move around?

Head lice CRAWL very fast and require head to head contact for transmission. It is possible that because of the way young children play, head lice are seen more widely amongst primary school children than adolescents or adults.

Do head lice live in carpets, clothes, hats or sheets?

No. Head lice very rarely fall from the head. They require blood to survive. Head lice feed 3-4 times a day and without blood, will dehydrate in 6 hours in a dry climate and 24 hours in a humid climate. An egg requires warmth to hatch and is the reason why they are laid close to the scalp. The further away from the scalp, the less likely they are to survive.

Is it true that head lice only like clean hair?

No. Head lice are not selective. They don't care if hair is long, short, blonde, brown, washed this morning or last week. As long as they are warm, and have blood to drink, then they are content.

Is there a way to prevent head lice?

No, not that we know of. It's important to check your child's head regularly with conditioner even when you don't think your child has head lice. There is no research to prove that chemical or herbal therapies can prevent head lice.

How does the conditioner and comb method work?

It's a very cheap and effective way of finding head lice. Hair conditioner does not kill lice, but it does stun them for about 20 minutes, meaning they do not move around, and it is difficult for them to hang on. This gives you time to comb through the hair with a lice comb.

How does a chemical treatment work?

Only use products that are licensed or registered for head lice. There are four different active chemicals that target head lice, each works differently and aim to kill lice and/or eggs.

Do some products work better than others?

Over time, head lice may develop resistance to some chemicals. It is important to check if a treatment you used has worked, and if not, treat again with another product that has a different chemical.

Why do you have to treat again in seven days' time?

Head lice eggs take 6-7 days to hatch. And when you treat, it's easy to miss an egg or two. By treating again in seven days, you are aiming to kill and comb out any lice that have since hatched from eggs, which were missed.

Should I treat everyone in the family?

It is important to check each family member, using conditioner and comb, for head lice but only treat those with live lice.

What should I wash or treat at home?

As head lice only live for a short time off the head, the only extra cleaning needed is to wash the pillowslip on the hot cycle or place in clothes dryer. Head lice combs can be cleaned in water hotter than 60 degrees.

Why does my child keep getting re-infected?

Re-infection is the least likely reason for head lice returning in a week's time. If eggs do not die, or were not removed during the original treatment they may hatch and the lifecycle occurs all over again. To break this lifecycle you must re-treat (regardless of treatment method) seven days after the first treatment and continue with weekly checking.